

# Children's Health Care Bill



## *Senator Gordon Smith (R-OR)*

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We also are not expanding government-run health care. SCHIP is a program that is delivered by private insurance companies. It is a program that requires families to pay premiums and copayments based on their income levels. It is for these reasons that SCHIP will garner strong, bipartisan support today.

I am pleased we will continue to utilize a 60 cent increase in the tobacco products excise tax to pay for SCHIP reauthorization ... in my opinion, there is no better means to provide funding for children's health care. I know some don't like this. It is, frankly, the only tax increase I enthusiastically support and for which I have ever consciously voted.

*-- Senate Floor Statements - September 27, 2007*

This bill marries good policy with good health care common-sense by funding a vital program for kids and discouraging smoking among our youth. We have found a workable solution to get coverage to those kids in need without over-extending the goals of the program. It would be irresponsible of the White House to veto this bill and deny millions of kids their chance at a healthy childhood.

*-- Press Release - September 27, 2007*

## Senate - September 27, 2007

Mr. SMITH. Mr. President, today is a momentous day. We have the opportunity to extend health insurance coverage to 10 million low-income children, 4 million of whom, without this bill, simply would continue to be a statistic in the ranks of the uninsured. In Oregon alone, we estimate that at least 60,000 new young people will receive health insurance and possibly even more.

Because of the outstanding work of my colleagues, Senators *Baucus*, *Grassley*, *Hatch*, and *Rockefeller*, and because of their work, we have before us a proposal that will garner wide, bipartisan support. I commend them for their efforts and thank them for their willingness to work with me to incorporate a number of important policies not only to Oregon but to millions of young Americans across this country.

When I first arrived in the Senate in 1997, I had the opportunity to learn about an outstanding idea launched by two great colleagues, Senators *Kennedy* and *Hatch*. That idea was known as the State Children's Health Insurance Program. When they described the details to me, I recognized in it many of the features I had worked on as an Oregon State Senator in the development of the Oregon health plan. I told them to sign me up and let me know how a junior Senator on the Budget Committee could help them. It was my privilege to do that with an amendment on that year's budget.

But here we are, 11 years later; now I serve on the Finance Committee, and I have had the opportunity to help craft a bill that will provide the authority and funding needed to continue SCHIP for another 5 years. It is a responsibility I took seriously then and still. I am pleased to have an opportunity today to renew it and improve it.

As I think of the work we have done to advance this bill, I wish to take a moment to highlight a number of critical policies I have worked hard to advance and which are now included in the bill before us.

First, and perhaps most important, I am pleased we will continue to utilize a 60 cent increase in the tobacco products excise tax to pay for SCHIP reauthorization. Looking back on the debate over the budget this past March, I didn't know, but I hoped at the time, my amendment to do this would garner the support necessary. It has done so. That support has held, and it is now the funding source for keeping the promise of SCHIP.

However, in my opinion, there is no better means to provide funding for children's health care. I know some don't like this. It is, frankly, the only tax increase I enthusiastically support and for which I have ever consciously voted. Not only can we extend health insurance to 10 million low-income children, we can do so while discouraging other young people from smoking. Studies show America's youth is strongly discouraged from smoking if the price of the tobacco product is increased. I am hopeful we will discourage thousands of kids from smoking, which will improve and perhaps save their lives. I see it as a ``twofer," to discourage smoking, and you can connect the habit of tobacco with all the public health care costs it imposes. It is a sad statistic that 20 percent of Oregonians who die each year die from tobacco-related illnesses.

I am also pleased to have been able to secure mental health parity in SCHIP. According to a report by the Urban Institute entitled ``Access to Children's Mental Health Services Under

Medicaid and SCHIP," the highest prevalence of mental health problems among all children, ages 6 to 17, is observed among Medicaid and SCHIP-eligible children at a rate significantly higher than for other insured children and uninsured children. Now, today, the Senate has taken a remarkable step forward to ensuring that SCHIP treats ailments of the mind on the same level as it treats ailments of the body. That is a notable achievement.

We are, as a Senate body, advancing the cause of mental health care as it has needed to be for some time but now hopefully soon. In this bill, and in the mental health parity bill earlier passed, we put mental health on parity with physical health.

This bill also reverses the harmful policy recently implemented by the administration. While I understand the President has some authority to help guide the development of Federal programs, in this instance, the policy released by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to restrict coverage of children with incomes over 250 percent of poverty simply goes too far.

Therefore, I strongly support the language in the bill that reinforces the Senate's position that States will be allowed to cover children with family incomes up to 300 percent of poverty. I also support the proposal to create a tracking system to more accurately determine who does and doesn't have insurance. This is vital as we continue to work to extend health insurance to all Americans.

Finally, I wish to note how pleased I am to see that States will be able to extend coverage to pregnant women through SCHIP. This makes sense. Prenatal care, when you are talking about children, is truly the point at which they can get the healthier start. Their mothers deserve this if we are serious about the children they bear. According to the National Committee for Quality Assurance, every dollar spent on prenatal care results in a 300-percent savings in postnatal care costs and an almost 500-percent savings in long-term morbidity costs. This is an investment we need to make, and it is well worth making.

Ten years after SCHIP became law, we now have a chance to support a bill that will cover 4 million new children who are already eligible for this program. This is not an expansion, though. This is simply keeping the promise of SCHIP with those children who are currently eligible but for whom we have not had the resources, the dollars, to fully fund this program.

While some have alleged we are expanding the program, expanding government-run health care, that rhetoric could not be further from the truth. We are not expanding the program, we are simply putting our money where our mouths have been. We are taking a step forward to give States the money they need to cover the children who already are qualified for SCHIP but, for one reason or another, are not enrolled. We also are not expanding government-run health care. SCHIP is a program that is delivered by private insurance companies. It is a program that requires families to pay premiums and copayments based on their income levels. It is for these reasons that SCHIP will garner strong, bipartisan support today.

In closing, I know there has been a great deal of rhetoric back and forth between the White House and the Hill. In this instance, with health care for millions of American children on the line, I urge my friend, President Bush, to take a fresh look at the details of this package and realize it is worthy of his support. I urge him to put aside the differences of this debate and sign this bill into law for the sake of our children, America's children.

I yield the floor.

September 27th, 2007 -- **REPUBLICAN SENATORS SUPPORT CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM**

WASHINGTON — Sens. Chuck Grassley and Orrin Hatch said there is significant support among Republicans for bicameral legislation to reauthorize the children's health insurance program.

The Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act under consideration today maintains all of the key policy provisions of the bill passed by the Senate in August, including a cap on new spending of \$35 billion.

Grassley and Hatch helped to draft the legislation as Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Finance and Ranking Member of the Finance Subcommittee on Health Care. They said the support of so many leading Republican senators indicates the strength of the bill and the success of the SCHIP program.

Supporters said:

"It is critical that we not let SCHIP expire and that we extend the program to cover additional low-income children. I urge my Senate colleagues to approve this vital legislation by a veto-proof margin. This program simply cannot be allowed to expire," said Sen. Susan Collins of Maine.

"While some may mistakenly characterize S-CHIP coverage as a welfare benefit, what they may not realize is that nearly 90 percent of uninsured children come from families where at least one parent is working. Today, fewer than half of parents in families earning less than \$40,000 a year are offered health insurance through their employer—a nine percent drop since 1997. S-CHIP has proved to be both a successful program and a saving grace for millions of American families who otherwise simply could not afford to pay for their children's health care. Compromise on both sides of the aisle helped us create this program ten years ago and hopefully a renewed sense of bipartisan commitment will help us successfully reauthorize this vital program today," Sen. Olympia Snowe of Maine.

**"This bill marries good policy with good health care common-sense by funding a vital program for kids and discouraging smoking among our youth. We have found a workable solution to get coverage to those kids in need without over-extending the goals of the program. It would be irresponsible of the White House to veto this bill and deny millions of kids their chance at a healthy childhood,"** said Sen. Gordon Smith of Oregon.

"I am proud to support this important bill, which will provide health insurance coverage to approximately 4 million more children who would otherwise be uninsured. I'm glad my colleagues and I were able to put politics aside and do what is right for these children," said Sen. Pat Roberts of Kansas.

“SCHIP is an important program to New Hampshire, providing health care coverage to thousands of lower-income children that would otherwise go uninsured. Months ago, I made a commitment to support reauthorization. I followed through by backing the Senate bill in August and will do so again when the final bill reaches the floor. House and Senate negotiators took the right step in rejecting drastic and unacceptable cuts to Medicare in the original House-passed legislation – a measure that would have jeopardized millions in funding to New Hampshire’s hospitals and nursing homes and would have all but eliminated the Medicare Advantage program that provides health care to more than 3,000 New Hampshire seniors,” said Sen. John Sununu of New Hampshire.

“New Mexico has a persistent problem with uninsured children. I helped create SCHIP as part of the 1997 Balanced Budget Act. My commitment to children’s health care remains firm today, and I believe this compromise SCHIP reauthorization bill should be enacted. The program has been a success. The number of children without health coverage has declined but the need for this program remains,” said Sen. Pete Domenici of New Mexico.

“The Children’s Health Insurance Program extends vital health care coverage to one of the most vulnerable segments of our population – low income children. Until we in Congress can agree on how to address the future of our nation’s health care policies, programs like the child health insurance program are needed to ensure that these children are not left out,” said Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska.

“This is about doing the right thing for families and ensuring access to health insurance for children who need it most. Passing an SCHIP bill is vital to Minnesota’s efforts to provide coverage for the state’s 80,000 uninsured children. This bill represents a sensible, bipartisan compromise, and I strongly encourage the President to sign it into law,” said Sen. Norm Coleman of Minnesota.

“We know that thousands of Alaska’s children have no health insurance. The passage of the SCHIP reauthorization bill is a first step in covering them. It ensures that one of our State’s most important programs – Denali KidCare – receives the necessary funds to deliver basic prevention and treatment services. Routine visits to doctors and dentists, substance abuse treatment, and essential prescription drugs can all be made available to our children and teens thanks to this funding,” said Sen. Ted Stevens of Alaska.

“The CHIP program works for ’s children. Because of this legislation six million children are receiving the health care they need to become healthy, productive citizens. When something works we must do everything in our power to continue its success. The bill we voted on today is a good compromise that addresses viewpoints from both sides of the aisle in the Senate, and between the House and the Senate. If this bill passes and the President lets it stand, we can help four million more of our nation’s children. This is what it is all about – helping those who cannot help themselves,” Hatch said.

“The legislation gets the children’s health insurance back on track by making states enroll low-income children and cutting off adult coverage. About half the new money is just to keep the program running for the kids already on it. The rest goes to enroll as many as 4 million new kids,” Grassley said.